

# NEWS

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
Office of Communications News Room 460-A  
Washington, DC 20250-1300  
Internet: News @usda.gov Phone: 202-720-9035  
World Wide Web Home Page: <http://www.usda.gov>

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Laura Trivers (202) 720-4623  
laura.trivers@usda.gov  
Tom Amontree (202) 720-4623  
tom.amontree@usda.gov

## **GLICKMAN ANNOUNCES NEW EFFORTS TO IMPROVE CIVIL RIGHTS, ASSIST SMALL FARMERS**

WASHINGTON, Dec. 17, 1997--Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman today announced additional efforts to improve USDA's civil rights program and to increase assistance for America's small and socially disadvantaged farmers.

"The ability to earn a decent living for yourself and your family from the land is the original American dream," Glickman said. "We must work hard to keep that dream alive for our nation's small farmers. Through their labor, America has the safest, most abundant food supply in the world."

Glickman said that two budget initiatives would improve USDA's service to small and socially disadvantaged farmers. First, President Clinton's FY 1999 budget proposal will seek full funding of \$85 million in direct farm ownership loans -- an 86 percent increase over 1998 levels, as well as full funding of \$500 million in direct operating loans. If approved by Congress, this additional funding will allow over 1,000 small and socially disadvantaged farmers to buy their farms and allow more than 12,000 farmers to receive assistance to continue operating their farms.

Second, Glickman announced that the Administration's FY 1999 budget will request full funding of \$10 million for the Section 2501 program -- Small Farmer Outreach Training and Technical Assistance Program -- an increase from \$3 million in Fiscal Year 1998. Through the newly formed Office of Outreach, this funding will be used to coordinate and provide leadership in delivering programs and services to historically under served populations ensuring that USDA programs are open to all that seek to use them.

"We've been making tremendous progress", Glickman said, "but there is still more we must do to strengthen further USDA's ability to improve its civil rights record."

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Glickman announced the creation of a permanent federal advisory committee on civil rights. The committee will be comprised of civil rights experts who will provide advice and recommendations to USDA as we implement policies to improve civil rights for USDA employees and customers. "The input and advice of independent experts will strengthen and enhance our ability to make fundamentally sound, long-term improvements to our civil rights programs," Glickman said.

Glickman also announced that President Clinton has asked the White House Counsel's Office to coordinate the efforts of USDA and the Department of Justice in evaluating the wide range of legal issues involved in USDA's effort to improve its civil rights record. "We are committed to using every possible legal remedy to improve civil rights at USDA," Glickman said. "But over the course of the past year, we have continued to encounter complex and difficult legal problems. The active involvement and expertise of the White House Counsel's office will help us to quickly and fairly resolve these issues."

In addition, Glickman announced that USDA will begin a new livestock feed program targeting American Indian Tribes for emergency livestock feed assistance. For the next 2 years, \$4 million dollars in assistance will be available annually for livestock feed losses caused by severe weather. This program differs from previous efforts in that direct cash payments will be made instead of grain donations.

Since the Civil Rights Action Team (CRAT) report of February 1997, the U.S. Department of Agriculture has been making an unprecedented effort to ensure that every USDA customer and employee is treated fairly and equitably, with dignity and respect. Key accomplishments include (1) a 10 percent increase in diversity on USDA state committees; (2) resolving 141 discrimination complaints, including 11 major settlements totaling \$3.5 million, as well as implementing a comprehensive plan to resolve the remaining complaints as quickly as possible; (3) establishing a Department-wide Office of Outreach to improve USDA's service to socially disadvantaged farmers; (4) establishing a new USDA foreclosure policy to ensure that no one loses their farm as a result of discrimination; and (5) imposing strict standards of accountability for upholding civil rights laws on all USDA employees.

Glickman also reiterated the Administration's commitment to work with Congress to ease the severe restrictions on USDA loans to farmers. The recent Farm Bill prohibits USDA, frequently the lender of last resort, from loaning money to any farmer who has ever had a debt forgiveness from USDA, rules that are more stringent than most commercial lending operations.

"Minority farmers are leaving the agriculture field at almost three times the rate of other small farmers. This Administration will not stand idly by and let this trend continue. The programs announced today are just a small part of what USDA is doing to protect America's small farm heritage. We are working with retailers, bankers, insurers, consumer groups, even foreign governments, to create new opportunities and new markets for our nation's small farmers," Glickman said.

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